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MISSOULA, MONTANA

Missoula's Drive from Cleanup to Community Building

Nestled in a valley along Montana's Clark Fork River is the community of Missoula. Throughout its industrial past of lumber mills and mining, the town suffered environmental degradation in numerous locations. Today, the city has made significant strides to restore the heart of its community. With the help of an EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant and the involvement of concerned citizens, Missoula has moved towards cleaning up two former abandoned lots while developing a plan to provide affordable housing for residents.

Industry Leaves Its Mark

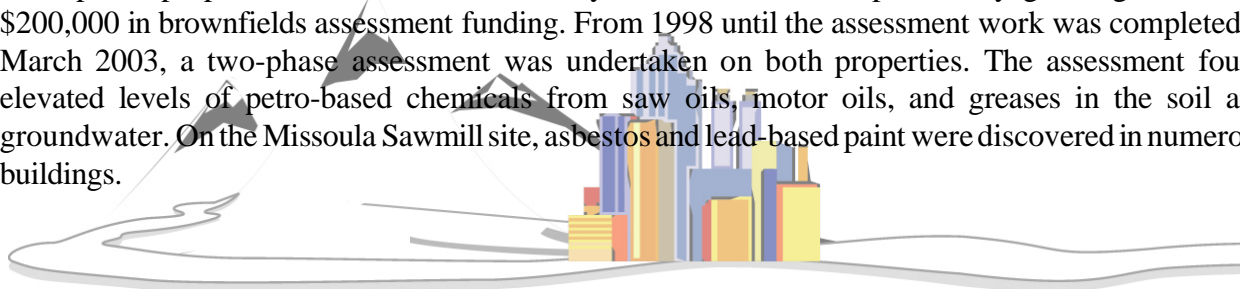
Historically, Missoula's economy relied heavily on timber and local mining operations, which the community thrived on until the 1960s. The decline of the timber industry resulted in massive job relocation and abandonment of the city's timber processing facilities, including the White Pine Sash property, located in the city's north side, and the Missoula Sawmill property, which is adjacent to the downtown area. Today, Missoula suffers from a weak economy and battles high unemployment and poverty. City-wide poverty levels have reached more than 19 percent in recent years.



White Pine Sash Site

Surrounding the White Pine Sash and the Missoula Sawmill brownfields sites are mostly disadvantaged neighborhoods with poverty rates close to 30 percent. Nearly a quarter of the city's poor live in these two neighborhoods. Both sites are former lumber treatment facilities that were abandoned in the 1990s. Both contaminated properties, totaling roughly 60 acres, subsequently fell into public ownership and became the public's collective concern to be dealt with. Combine the environmental burden of these large sites with a very serious need for affordable housing in the area and one begins to see the challenges faced by decision makers in Missoula.

As part of its response, the City of Missoula reached out to EPA for help. As Jenifer Blumberg, Missoula's Brownfields Coordinator, explains, "Both the City and County governments of Missoula understand just how important the EPA funding is to the redevelopment of its two major brownfields sites, prime properties in the heart of the city". In 1998, EPA responded by granting Missoula \$200,000 in brownfields assessment funding. From 1998 until the assessment work was completed in March 2003, a two-phase assessment was undertaken on both properties. The assessment found elevated levels of petro-based chemicals from saw oils, motor oils, and greases in the soil and groundwater. On the Missoula Sawmill site, asbestos and lead-based paint were discovered in numerous buildings.



Cleanup will soon be underway and is estimated to cost approximately \$600,000 to \$800,000 in total. The City and County of Missoula plans to use the recently awarded \$1 million Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Grant to help facilitate cleanup.

From Sawdust to Success

From the beginning of the project, the city realized in order for redevelopment of the two sites to be successful, it needed to incorporate the ideas and desires of both local officials and area residents. Using community meetings as a platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns, the city learned of citizen concerns, whose collective voice reaffirmed the need for affordable housing. The friendly interaction between city planners, neighbors, and other stakeholders has led to plans that incorporate future residential development into a vision that includes parks and trails. The recently awarded Brownfields RLF is anticipated to help strengthen commitment for redevelopment.



Missoula Sawmill Site

Upon completion of cleanup activities at these brownfields sites, both will have enormous potential for economic redevelopment, which will also benefit the surrounding community. "We are already receiving inquiries from developers about the availability of the EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund," said Blumberg. Missoula's community-involvement drove its brownfields turnaround and can be a model for other cities to follow.

For the latest information about the Missoula Brownfields project, please contact Jenifer Blumberg, Missoula Brownfields Coordinator, at (406) 258-3688, or Mary Ahlstrom, EPA Region 8, at (303) 312-6626.

